

Puerto Rico

Geography

Puerto Rico is the easternmost island of the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea, approximately a thousand miles southeast of Florida and just east of the Dominican Republic and west of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The island is approximately 100 miles wide in an east-west direction and 35 miles wide between the north and south coasts. The coasts of tropical Puerto Rico are flat but most of the interior is mountainous. The tallest mountain is in the center of the island, Cerro de Punta, which is 4,389 feet high (1338 meters). About eight percent of the land is arable for agriculture. Droughts and hurricanes are the major natural hazards.



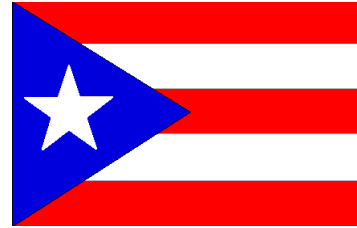
Government

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

History

When Christopher Columbus arrived in 1493, the island was inhabited by the peaceful Arawak Indians or Tainos, who were being challenged by the warlike Carib Indians. Puerto Rico remained economically undeveloped until 1830, when sugarcane, coffee, and tobacco plantations were gradually developed. After Puerto Ricans began to press for independence, Spain granted the island broad powers of self-government in 1897. But during the Spanish-American War of 1898 American troops invaded the island and Spain ceded it to the U.S. Since then, Puerto Rico has remained an unincorporated U.S. territory. Its people were granted American citizenship under the Jones Act in 1917; were permitted to elect their own governor, beginning in 1948; and now fully administer their internal affairs under a constitution approved by the U.S. Congress in 1952.

A self-help program of economic development and social welfare (called “Operation Bootstrap”) was forged in the 1940s by four-time governor Luis Muñoz Marín. In a little more than four decades, much of the island's crushing poverty was eliminated. This was done partly through the development of manufacturing and service industries, the latter related to an enormous growth in tourism. Also, many Puerto Ricans migrated to large cities on the mainland U.S. Under the Commonwealth formula, residents of Puerto Rico lack voting representation in Congress and do not participate in presidential elections. As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans are subject to military service and most federal laws. Residents of the Commonwealth pay no federal income tax on locally generated earnings, but Puerto Rican government income-tax rates are set at a level that closely parallels federal-plus-state levies on the mainland.



Agriculture

The agriculture of Puerto Rico is specialized and commercial, devoted primarily to crops which can be sold in the United States. If all the arable land on the Island was planted to food crops for domestic consumption rather than cash crops for export, it would not support the total population.

The establishment of two experimental farms, one in Rio Piedras and the other in Mayagüez, inaugurated the scientific study of agriculture in Puerto Rico and led to systematized plant introduction. The opening of the United States Experiment Station in Mayagüez in 1902 marked the beginning of a new era in scientific agricultural research. In 1905 a land-grant college of agriculture was established (The College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, known today as the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez). The Insular Department of Agriculture was established in 1917. Through the United States Department of Agriculture and the Experimental Stations, plants of economic importance have been introduced or improved. Important food plants, such as rice, mangos, avocados, corn, coffee, and green cover crops have been introduced in to the Island. The experiment stations have improved livestock by introducing better breeds of cattle and other domestic animals. Fertilizers are being used for nearly all important crops. Soil studies are carried on to increase the efficient use of land through fertilization and conservation methods, and a survey of all the soils of the Island has been made.

In recent years soil conservation practices have been introduced as a measure in solving the Island's agricultural and population problems. The general opinion in Puerto Rico has regarded overpopulation as the fundamental problem of the Island. However, soil conservation experts believe that population pressure can be largely relieved by more efficient utilization of the land. To assist in attaining this objective, the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture has established in the Island, through the co-operation of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration and Insular Experiment Stations, an office for the purpose of carrying on investigations and demonstrations and developing the best means for conserving soil and moisture.

The top 10 agricultural products in fiscal 2008-2009 (July 1 to June 30), in order of importance, were the following: dairy, plantains, poultry, ornamental plants, seeds and seedlings, coffee, beef and veal, tomatoes, pork, and forage.

